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Statement on Legislation and Integration in Housing

Rhode Island State Council of Churches

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Rhode Island State Council of Churches
SOCIAL ACTION DEPARTMENT
2 Stimson Avenue
Providence 6, Rhode Island

STATEMENT ON LEGISLATION AND INTEGRATION IN HOUSING

In the midst of the present turmoil in parts of this nation around the court's decision regarding integration it has seemed good and right that our churches and people should forcefully remind themselves of the undeniable conviction born of faith that men are created equal by God our Father and that his son our Lord Jesus Christ most assuredly died on behalf of all men whatever their color, faith or national origin. God has in this generation placed upon us the urgent task and responsibility to put our whole energy and wisdom to the business of removing the false barriers among men and establishing a relationship of justice and love.

The churches have made pronouncement again and again of their conviction that racial intolerance and prejudice and segregation are acts of rebellion against God and a refusal of His purpose as revealed in the Gospel. The people of Rhode Island have through legislation and voluntary action made known their will to remove discrimination in such realms as education and employment. There is still great need for work in these areas for it is surely true that in our society accomplishment in other realms hangs upon economic opportunity.

However, it is the belief of your Social Action Department that the area of most pressing concern in Rhode Island today is that of housing. The perpetuation of residential segregation by whatever means is evil. If there is segregation today in public education and in our churches it is in part due to the living patterns in our communities which force racial and other minority groups to live in restricted areas. But even more significant this separation of peoples from one another hinders if it does not destroy the possibility of the kinds of contacts between people which alone can destroy prejudice.

We therefore urge all people to think carefully and deeply about their own feelings and attitudes in regard to their own neighborhoods. We implore churchmen in real estate and banking to do all in their power to allow qualified persons whatever their race to buy or rent property within their means. We deplore the ugly practice engaged in by some speculators of using the fears of both white and Negro people for financial gain in areas of our city which are rapidly changing.

Finally we here record our support of legislation which will seek to guarantee the rights of persons regardless of race, color or religion or national origin to rent or purchase property within their means. Many of us have rightly said that legislation will not solve the problem: it will not remove the prejudice in a man's heart. This is surely so. But good legislation expresses the common will of the people to achieve a degree of justice. The law acts upon us to limit our prejudice and our sin. It acts creatively and positively toward the restoration of a community divided by fear, intolerance and hatred. By laws we establish a standard of justice and set ourselves a goal which in a measure at least we may be given to achieve.

We believe that God has laid upon our own time and generation the whole burden of racial intolerance and strife. By His grace, we may be given a will to replace hatred with love, suspicion with trust, ignorance with understanding, unto a greater unity of God's whole people whom He loves with an everlasting love shown forth in Jesus Christ, our Lord.

December 4, 1958